

{In Archive} Fw: Uranium Mining in/around Goliad TX-Reply

Larry Wright to: LaGayla Bradley, Diane Smith
Cc: Philip Dellinger, Ray Leissner

06/11/2007 04:22 PM

From: Larry Wright/R6/USEPA/US
To: LaGayla Bradley/R6/USEPA/US@EPA, Diane Smith/R6/USEPA/US@EPA
Cc: Philip Dellinger/R6/USEPA/US@EPA, Ray Leissner/R6/USEPA/US@EPA
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FYI

----- Forwarded by Larry Wright/R6/USEPA/US on 06/11/2007 04:21 PM -----



Jose Torres/R6/USEPA/US

06/11/2007 02:52 PM

To moondawn_butterfly@hotmail.com

cc

Subject Uranium Mining in/around Goliad TX-Reply

EPA Region 6 Internet Feedback (<http://www.epa.gov/earth1r6>)

Original Message: My family owns some land in Goliad, TX. We've recently become aware of the Uranium mining issue they have been having there. About 95% of the population is against it for fear of water contamination. I, myself, am a geology student and what I've read and heard about this issue concerns me as well. What can be done from an environmental prevention stand-point on this subject? Who should concerned parties contact and when does the EPA get involved? I would appreciate any response. Thanks, Kelly Harris

Response by EPA: Dear Ms. Harris:

Thank you for writing to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and for your questions regarding the possibility that uranium mining operations may be started in Goliad County, Texas. I will try to answer your questions by providing the following information:

In the United States, for regulatory purposes, uranium mining using the in-situ solution (some prefer to call it in-situ leaching) method falls within the jurisdiction of the federal Underground Injection Control (UIC) program. This type of mining operation involves the injection, through wells, of solutions that dissolve and remove the uranium ore from the aquifer strata. Nearby production wells pump this mineral bearing fluid to the surface where the uranium is removed.

Typically, in a uranium in-situ solution mining operation, a designated mine area is circumscribed by a ring of monitoring wells. The injection and producer wells in an authorized production area are located within this ring. During mining operations, the volume of the liquids lifted to the surface at the producing wells should always exceed the volume of the liquids pumped into the injection wells.

The wells forming the monitoring well ring are used to verify that no liquids from the mined area have migrated into the portion of the aquifer located outside the designated mining area; in other words, they are used to verify that no "excursions" have occurred. The absence of "excursions" is confirmed by comparing the chemical composition of the liquids within the mined area to that of the liquids in the aquifer prior to commencing mining operations (the baseline composition). For that reason, it is very important that operators and land owners determine the aquifer's baseline conditions before mining operations start.

Federal regulations provide measures for preventing the endangerment of underground sources of drinking water (USDWs) from these operations. All operators of uranium mining injection wells must

apply for (and obtain) a permit before injection operations begin. The injection wells used in uranium in-situ solution mining operations are classified as Class III injection wells, and the details on how these wells must be operated are provided within the issued permits.

In the state of Texas, the portion of the federal UIC program that applies to uranium in-situ solution mining has been delegated by EPA to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ). EPA maintains oversight authority, and I am responsible for oversight of TCEQ's UIC program. For specific details on the delegated UIC program (in-situ solution mining operations) or the Goliad County operations, you may contact the following members of TCEQ's staff:

Ben Knape
(512) 239-6633
bknape@tceq.state.tx.us

John Santos
(512) 239-1030
jsantos@tceq.state.tx.us

You may also visit the Commission's website at www.tceq.state.tx.us for additional information.

Since uranium ore deposits may occur inside USDWs, the federal regulations contemplate the exemption of mineral bearing portions of those aquifers (USDWs) from their status as a USDW, providing that they meet a number of requirements. Therefore, an operator who wants to initiate uranium in-situ solution mining operations in a given area of the nation, must file an "Aquifer Exemption" petition. In the state of Texas, such petition is to be filed with TCEQ. Once an "Aquifer Exemption" petition has been filed, TCEQ is required to send EPA a request for a delegated UIC program revision to exclude the portion of the aquifer to be mined from USDW status. At this point, EPA becomes involved in the review and approval/disapproval process. After a decision has been made on TCEQ's request, a reply is provided to TCEQ. If TCEQ's request is approved, then TCEQ may approve the operator's petition and applications, and operations may commence.

I hope that you will find the preceding discussion satisfactory. Please feel free to e-mail or call me if you have additional questions. Sincerely,

Jose Eduardo Torres - 6WQ-SG
EPA, Region 6
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